

THE TRANSIT OF VENUS.

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Venus will be the evening star until Dec. 6, and morning star the rest of the month. There will be no hesitation in determining which of the planets leads the list, for the movements of Venus are more important than those of all the other planets combined, or indeed of any other celestial event, even the advent of another comet exceeding in proportions our present august visitor. On the 6th the grand epoch occurs, for then the planet, reaching her inferior conjunction, makes a transit over the sun's face. No intelligent person who realizes its importance will fail to do as much toward the celebration of the rare event as to follow the planet's course, with the aid of a piece of smoked glass, at some time during the passage. It is the simplest sight imaginable, a tiny black dot making its way over the sun, but the solution of the great problem of the sun's distance may hinge on the seemingly unimportant occurrence. Venus will appear on the sun's limb over the whole United States at nearly the same moment of absolute time, at about 8:55 o'clock in the morning; she will leave it and the transit will end about 3 o'clock, Washington mean time. The tables of Venus are not quite perfect, and therefore the predicted time may differ a minute or two from the observed time. Such is the importance attached by astronomers to the transit that millions of dollars will probably be appropriated by the Governments of different countries and spent by private individuals in observing the phenomenon. Scientific observers will be numbered by thousands, while no figures can compute the labor and painstaking involved in the intricate processes that enter into the mathematical calculations. All that the most sanguine astronomers expect to accomplish is the right to add or subtract less than the tenth of a second from the sun's parallax as now received, though this infinitesimal angular error represents something like a half-million miles in the solar distance. At half the stations in the most favorable localities, the weather will prevent observation. But at the other half, all that human power can do in wresting the secrets of the sun will be accomplished, and the only opportunity that will occur for 132 years will be improved. After the transit, we shall lose the fairest of the stars from the evening sky, but only for a short time. In a few days she will reappear in the east as a morning star; at the close of the month she will be a superb object in the morning sky, rising two hours and a half before the sun, and sharing with the comet, if the celestial visitor has not left for parts unknown, in the chief attractions of the celestial view. Venus sets now a few minutes before 5 o'clock in the evening; at the end of the month she rises about 4:45 o'clock in the morning.